

## Setting the Stage for Children's Talk

Assessing Children's Talk  
Connect with the Classroom  
Assessing Children's Talk

### Overview

This activity is an opportunity for you to assess the oral language development of several children in your classroom, reflect on the information you gather in the assessment, and then develop a plan for incorporating what you've learned into your instruction.

### Objectives

- To carry out an oral language assessment.
- To reflect on the assessment process and results.
- To create a plan for adapting your instruction and your approach to scaffolding children's talk in accordance with what you learn from the assessment.

### Materials

- Two copies of the "Assessing Children's Talk Activity Sheet," below, one for each child you will assess in this activity

### Instructions

1. Select two children from your class to assess. You might consider focusing on children who you believe could use some extra attention (because they've fallen behind, because they're not being sufficiently challenged, or for any reason at all).
2. Assess the two children you selected, using the Teacher Rating of Oral Language and Literacy (TROLL) assessment included in the activity sheet below.
  - Read the full instructions and descriptions that accompany the assessment.
  - Use the scoring table at the end of the TROLL to score each child's assessment.
3. Answer the reflection questions that follow the assessment to plan to scaffold your children's oral language development. .
4. Using the reflection questions in the activity sheet as your guide, reflect on your experiences in this exercise. Have your thoughts and notes ready to share with other teachers taking this course in *Share Ideas*.

**CIRCLE Tip**

One of any teacher's greatest challenges is the variability across language skills in the classroom. Due to personality or language ability, some children will talk eagerly and with fluency, while others might struggle to communicate at all.

Here are some tips on how teachers can support and scaffold *each and every* child in the classroom:

- Pay attention to children's signals
  - Are they engaged?
  - Are they making eye contact with you periodically or looking down?
- Organize the class into small groups from time to time so that the less verbal children don't have to compete with more verbal children for attention.
- Make sure that children have a reason to talk and something meaningful to talk about.
- Let each child set his or her own talking pace.
  - Stop and count the seconds between the time you say something and the time the child responds.
  - Make sure to always give each child the time they personally need to respond.
- If a child isn't talking, don't try to force it.
  - Children won't talk freely if they feel they're under pressure.
  - Let it go, and come back to that child later on.
- Let silence happen.
  - Allow pauses, gaps, silences, and empty spaces to happen in classroom talk.
  - If you don't fill those silences, your children might!

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **Assessing Children's Talk Activity Sheet**

### **Part I: The Teacher Rating of Oral Language and Literacy (TROLL)**

#### **Background Information**

The Teacher Rating of Oral Language and Literacy (TROLL) is a four-part assessment that measures language use, reading, and writing. The section of TROLL provided below addresses assessment of children's language skills.

TROLL was developed by David Dickinson at The Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA). CIRCLE recommends administering the tool at the beginning of the year, at midyear, and again at the end of the year.

#### **The Role of the Teacher**

The teacher:

- Administers the language-screening tool.
- Observes the child in the classroom on an ongoing basis.
- Determines the child's needs and tailors instruction to the child.
- Uses various instructional strategies, including small-group and one-on-one instruction, to scaffold the child's language acquisition.
- Has conversations with the parents.

If after a range of observations over time, the teacher determines that the child is not progressing and is at risk, the teacher has a discussion with administrative staff to develop a plan for the child.

#### **CIRCLE's Recommendation**

Feel free to print out the assessment below and use it to assess the children in your classroom. But remember, CIRCLE recommends that teachers use administrative staff and/or professional diagnosticians to interpret screening and standardized test scores and to recommend classroom strategies for assisting children in language development. Teachers are not charged with acting as evaluation specialists or diagnosticians.

Child's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

1. How would you describe this child's willingness to start a conversation with adults and peers and continue trying to communicate when he/she is not understood on the first attempt? Select the statement that best describes how hard the child works to be understood by others.

Child almost never begins a conversation with peers or the teacher and never keeps trying if unsuccessful at first.	Child sometimes begins conversation with either peers or the teacher. If initial efforts fail he/she often gives up quickly.	Child begins conversations with both peers and teachers on occasion. If initial efforts fail, he/she will sometimes keep trying.	Child begins conversations with both peers and teachers. If initial efforts fail, he/she will work hard to be understood.
1	2	3	4

2. How well does the child communicate personal experiences in a clear and logical way? Assign the score that best describes this child when he/she is attempting to tell an adult about events that happened at home or some other place where you were not present.

Child is very tentative, only offers a few words, requires you to ask questions. Has difficulty responding to questions you ask.	Child offers some information, but information needed to really understand the event is missing (e.g., where or when it happened, who was present, the sequence of what happened).	Child offers information and sometimes includes the necessary information to really understand the event.	Child freely offers information and tells experiences in a way that is nearly always complete, well sequenced, and comprehensible.
1	2	3	4

3. How would you describe this child's pattern of asking questions about topics that interest him/her (e.g., why things happen, why people act the way they do)? Assign the score that best describes the child's approach to displaying curiosity by asking adults questions.

To your knowledge, the child has never asked an adult a question reflecting curiosity about why things happen or why people do things.	On a few occasions the child has asked adults some questions. The discussion that resulted was brief and limited in depth.	On several occasions the child has asked interesting questions. On occasion, these have lead to an interesting conversation.	Child often asks adults questions reflecting curiosity. These often lead to interesting, extended conversations.
1	2	3	4

4. How would you describe this child's use of talk while pretending in the house area, when playing with blocks, etc.? Consider the child's use of talk with peers to start pretending and to carry it out. Assign the score that best applies.

Child rarely or never engages in pretend play or else never talks while pretending.	On occasion the child engages in pretending that includes some talk. Talk is brief, may only be used when starting the play, and is of limited importance to the ongoing play activity.	Child engages in pretending often and conversations are sometimes important to the play. On occasion child engages in some back-and-forth pretend dialogue with another child.	Child often talks in elaborate ways while pretending. Conversations that are carried out "in role" are common and are an important part of the play. Child sometimes steps out of pretend play to give directions to another child.
1	2	3	4

5. How would you describe the child's ability to recognize and produce rhymes?

Child cannot ever say if two words rhyme and cannot produce a rhyme when given examples (e.g., rat, cat, ____).	Child occasionally produces or identifies rhymes when given help.	Child spontaneously produces rhymes and can sometimes tell when word pairs rhyme.	Child spontaneously rhymes words of more than one syllable and always identifies whether words rhyme.
1	2	3	4

6. How often does the child use a varied vocabulary or try out new words (e.g., heard in stories or from teacher)?

NEVER	RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN
1	2	3	4

7. When the child speaks to adults other than you or the teaching assistant, is he/she understandable?

NEVER	RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN
1	2	3	4

8. How often does the child express curiosity about how and why things happen?

NEVER	RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN
1	2	3	4

## SCORING:

Tally the total raw score for all eight questions. Divide your total by 8. Then check the tables below to determine if follow-up is needed.

For example, a child with a raw score of 19 has a TROLL Language Score of 19 divided by 8, which is 2.375.

Note: There are two tables, one for the fall (or beginning of the year) and one for the spring (or end of the year).

3 Year Old's TROLL Scores	4 Year Old's TROLL Scores	5 Year Old's TROLL Scores	Recommendations/Meaning
FALL	FALL	FALL	FALL
Scores below 1.6	Scores below 1.72	Scores below 2.04	Assessment by child audiologist, speech-language pathologist. Discuss concerns with parents.
Scores between 1.61 and 1.76	Scores between 1.73 and 2.08	Scores between 2.05 and 2.36	Assessment of child by speech- language pathologist, extra involvement in extended conversations and other literacy activities.
Scores between 1.77 and 2.04	Scores between 2.09 and 2.44	Scores between 2.37 and 2.72	Child is performing at an average level.
Scores between 2.05 and 2.44	Scores between 2.45 and 2.84	Scores between 2.73 and 3.0	Child is performing above average.
Scores above 2.45	Scores above 2.85	Scores above 3.0	Child should be encouraged to read and write at advanced levels in school and at home.

3 Year Old's TROLL Scores	4 Year Old's TROLL Scores	5 Year Old's TROLL Scores	Recommendations/Meaning
SPRING	SPRING	SPRING	SPRING
Scores below 1.76	Scores below 1.84	Scores below 2.2	Assessment by child audiologist, speech-language pathologist. Discuss concerns with parents.
Scores between 1.77 and 1.96	Scores between 1.85 and 2.2	Scores between 2.21 and 2.6	Assessment of child by speech- language pathologist, extra involvement in extended conversations and other literacy activities.
Scores between 1.97 and 2.24	Scores between 2.21 and 2.64	Scores between 2.61 and 3.04	Child is performing at an average level.
Scores between 2.25 and 2.48	Scores between 2.65 and 2.96	Scores between 3.05 and 3.4	Child is performing above average.
Scores above 2.49	Scores above 2.97	Scores above 3.41	Child should be encouraged to read and write at advanced levels in school and at home.



## **Part II: Reflect and Plan**

Child's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

1. How did this assessment help you to think about this child's oral language development?
  
2. What kinds of situations or settings motivate this child to talk?
  
3. What kinds of situations or settings does this child tend not to respond to?
  
4. What does this child do well (in terms of talk and oral language)?
  
5. How would you like to see this child improve his/her talking abilities?
  
6. How can you use what you know about what motivates this child and what the child does well to scaffold the child's oral language development?
  
7. Moving forward, plan three things you can do with this child to scaffold and encourage his/her talk.

Plan #1:

Plan #2:

Plan #3: